



Quaker Voluntary Action Working Retreats to Ramallah

Bearing Witness, Becoming Agents of Change in the World

Quaker Voluntary Action's (QVA) annual trip to Ramallah has been a regular feature of their programming for many years. It usually takes place over 12 days in October and is based in three geographical centres: Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and Ramallah. Whilst in Ramallah we attend the Meeting for Worship at the Meeting House and also visit the Friends Schools.

To lead a QVA trip you first must attend one as a group member; thus, my first trip to Israel/Palestine was as a group member on the 2014 trip. That for me was a very profound experience. I had read many books about the situation and had sat through a multitude of TV programmes on the conflict, but it is only when you see it with your own eyes that the enormity and intensity of the conflict really hits home.

A year later, I was given the opportunity to jointly lead the 2015 trip. There was obviously more responsibility - and sometimes that responsibility can weigh very heavily. The situation prior to our departure in October 2015 was quite tense. Obviously, the safety and security of the group when they are in the region is of the utmost concern; but after the decision was made to go ahead with the trip, people were doubly welcoming when we did meet them as part of the programme.



Fellowship Lunch, Ramallah Meeting House

In Britain's *Advice and Queries* we are enjoined to 'Live Adventurously' and 'Let your life speak'. Being able to jointly lead a QVA trip fulfils those assertions in full. For me this **IS** 'Faith in Action'.

While leading the trip, I was able to use the organising and facilitating skills that I had acquired during a professional lifetime in education. Those skills helped to produce an interesting and meaningful programme for the group. It can be challenging to meet with those whom we might disagree, but that opportunity can produce a dialogue which otherwise would not have happened. Also, ample time for reflection was woven into the programme.

As the annual trip takes place in October when the olives are harvested in Palestine, we join local communities to help with their harvest and to stand in solidarity with them. Their hospitality and generosity of spirit make those days memorable.

I would hope that the QVA trip provides for participants a very rich experience so that group members can go back to the UK (and indeed worldwide) and tell their stories. After all, the world won't get better on its own and bearing witness to the situation in Israel/Palestine is the first step to changing it. That alone can justify what QVA does.



QVA Group Harvesting Olives October 2016, Ramallah Meeting House Peace Garden



David Grundy

Joint-Leader QVA Trip 2015 & Ramallah Friends Meeting Attender